



MACON/BIBB CITIZEN  
ADVOCACY, INC.

# COMMUNITY CURRENTS

WINTER 2015

## A Healing Balm for a Hurting Heart

The smell of chicken frying and cornbread in an iron skillet in the oven; a neat, clean home filled with the laughter of family and neighbors; generations of family that grew up on the same street and shared many meals, movies and joyful get-togethers –these are the things that Kenny remembers growing up. Especially his mother with her beautiful smile; she was gracious, warm and welcoming to any and all. She loved to cook and one could always smell the appetizing aromas of dinner on the stove. Kenny’s grandmother lived next door and he could often be found there, watching movies.

But everything changed in 2011 when Kenny’s mom passed away after a lengthy illness –no more warmth, no more savory meals. Not long after, Kenny’s grandmother had to go into a nursing home and was followed by Kenny’s father after he was involved in a car accident. All good things began to disappear in 2011 and Kenny found himself completely alone by 2013 when his father passed away as well. With the passing of his parents, things quickly changed in Kenny’s home. Though a kindly neighbor across the street made sure that Kenny had food and that his representative payee paid the utility bills, a vagrant took advantage of his vulnerability and moved into the home.

When the Citizen Advocacy Coordinator told Gayle how Kenny’s life had changed and asked her to be his crisis advocate, she promptly said “yes” and the two were introduced at Gayle’s office in October of 2014.

As Gayle and Kenny began spending time together, Gayle realized what a nice, respectful young man Kenny is and a beautiful friendship developed. They began having lunch together and the two grew very close during these lunches, shopping and attending softball games (Kenny became part of a team with Gayle’s assistance). Kenny met Gayle’s family and grew close to them as well. Gayle also assisted in a reconnection with Kenny’s aunt and grandmother and Kenny was able to spend Christmas at Aunt Diane’s house amid a beautiful tree, lots of gifts and delicious food.

As a member of Mable White Baptist Church, Kenny also became friends with Pastor Glenn, an associate pastor of the church. Pastor Glenn spends time with Kenny and makes sure he gets to church each Sunday.

To aid Kenny in acquiring suitable housing, Gayle applied for a Medicaid waiver for him that will fund his housing financial obligations. When the waiver was approved Gayle and Kenny looked at various apartments until finding just the right one at Austin Chase in north Macon. Kenny now shares the apartment with two of his friends.

Conscious of the hurts that Kenny has experienced in the past, Gayle takes time to nurture and comfort Kenny and has been a healing balm for a lonely and hurting heart. “I could see the loneliness in his eyes,” said Gayle. “He really needed some help and he was all alone.” Easygoing and engaging, Kenny is a talker and enjoys getting to know new people; he enjoys his relationship with Gayle as well and remembers vividly the day they met. “Since my Mom passed, Gayle has been like a mom to me,” he says, “since October 4, 2014.” “I love Kenny,” said Gayle. “He is a wonderful part of my life and I love spending time with him. I feel uplifted when he’s around.”



Kenny Day

## David Pitonyak presents *The Importance of Belonging*

Approximately 100 people gathered together on Wednesday, October 15, 2015 at the Macon Marriott to experience *The Importance of Belonging*, an all-day seminar given by David Pitonyak. A behavioral consultant dedicated to supporting people who experience disabilities, Pitonyak's practice is based on the premise that difficult behaviors result from unmet needs and that individuals with disabilities are often missing meaningful relationships, a sense of safety and well-being, power, things to look forward to, and a sense of value and self-worth. Macon Bibb Citizen Advocacy staff and board members were joined by advocates and protégés to learn about the social brain and were challenged to think about ways in which to help persons with disabilities be comfortable in new and unfamiliar settings.

### The Wrong Questions

For years, the human services profession has been preoccupied with three questions:

What's wrong with you?

How do we fix you?

What do we do with you if we can't fix you?

The central function of our human services system, in my view, should be to help people who experience disabilities to develop and maintain "enduring, freely-chosen relationships." Why?



### The Importance of Belonging

"A sense of belonging," writes Dr. Kenneth Pelletier of the Stanford Center for Research and Disease Prevention "appears to be a basic human need – as basic as food and shelter. In fact, social support may be one of the critical elements distinguishing those who remain healthy from those who become ill."

Although the reasons why social support leads to better health are not entirely understood (one theory is that belonging improves immune function), the implications are profound for people who experience services. It may be that a great deal of what we see as pathology (e.g. poor health, mental health issues, problem behaviors, etc.), is, in fact, a symptom of loneliness.

Sydney Cobb, president of the Society of Psychosomatic Medicine, argues that the data supporting a link between loneliness and illness is overwhelming – that "social support can indeed protect people in crisis from what he calls a 'wide variety' of diseases. Adequate social support, Cobb says, has been proven to protect against conditions from 'low birth weight to death, through tuberculosis to depression, alcoholism, and other psychiatric illness. Furthermore, social support can reduce the amount of medication required, accelerate recovery, and facilitate compliance with prescribed regimens.'" People who are suffering from a break down in social support are also more prone to cancer, hypertension, and heart disease. It's true – you *can* die from a broken heart.

David Pitonyak

From *The Importance of Belonging*

[www.dimagine.com](http://www.dimagine.com)

## The Dignity of Risk: A Poem

What if you never got to make a mistake?

What if your money was always kept in an envelope where you couldn't get it?

What if you were never given a chance to do well at something?

What if your only chance to be with people different from you was with your own family?

What if the job you did was not useful?

What if you never got to make a decision?

What if the only risky thing you could do was act out?

What if you couldn't go outside because the last time you went it rained?

What if you had to wear your winter coat when it rained because it was all you had?

What if you had no privacy?

What if you could do part of the grocery shopping but weren't allowed because you couldn't do all of the shopping?

What if you spent three hours every day just waiting?

What if you grew old and never knew adulthood?

What if you never got a chance?

*Linda Stengle*

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*"Loneliness is the only real disability."*  
Beth Mount

*"There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about."*

Margaret Wheatley



*Watch our Video*



*"There are no "special needs," only ordinary, common everyday ones."*

David Pitonyak



*"It's only through sharing and taking on new challenges that we become fully human."*

Curtis Zimmerman

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**An Invitation to Action**

Citizen Advocacy is an opportunity to stand by, for and with another person, taking action to ensure a better life and an enrichment of opportunity for a person who may, because they have a disability, have been subject to isolation and segregation, rejection and abuse, poverty and injustice.

**CITIZEN ADVOCACY**

A Valued Citizen, unpaid and independent of human services, creates a relationship with a person who has a developmental disability and is at risk of social exclusion.

The citizen advocate represents and responds to that person's interests, and brings the gifts and concerns of the person into circles of ordinary community life.

Donate online at:

[maconbibbcitizenadvocacy.org](http://maconbibbcitizenadvocacy.org)

or by mail to:

Macon/Bibb Citizen Advocacy

613 Cherry Street

Macon, Georgia 31201

We welcome and depend on your support!

**Thank You**

Citizen Advocacy is a community-strengthening endeavor that depends on the support of local citizens. All investments directly benefit the Macon/Bibb County community. Our thanks to these folks who have invested from January 2014 through September 2015.

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